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ABSTRACT

This manual is designed to help recent graduates with and without disabilities of the Springfield Technical Community College in Springfield, Massachusetts, conduct a successful job search. It addresses: (1) equipment a job searcher will need; (2) when to begin a job search; (3) tips on writing a resume; (4) cover letters; (5) networking and developing sources of referrals to job openings; (6) disclosure of disability; (7) interviewing; (8) interim/temporary employment; (9) accepting rejections; and (10) rejecting acceptances. Graduates are urged to disclose only disability accommodations required for the interview before the interview and to state clearly workplace accommodation needs in a hiring interview after the job is offered. Appendices include a sample cover letter, a list of 23 questions frequently asked by recruiters, and a list of 14 questions job searchers can ask a recruiter. (CR)

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ED 432 112

**Springfield Technical Community College**

**Office of Disability Services**

**Springfield, MA 01105**

# *Quick Results*

## *in*

# *Your Job Search*

A Job Search Manual
for Prospective and Recent Graduates
with and without Disabilities

by

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Springfield, MA

&

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Greenfield, MA

EC 307317

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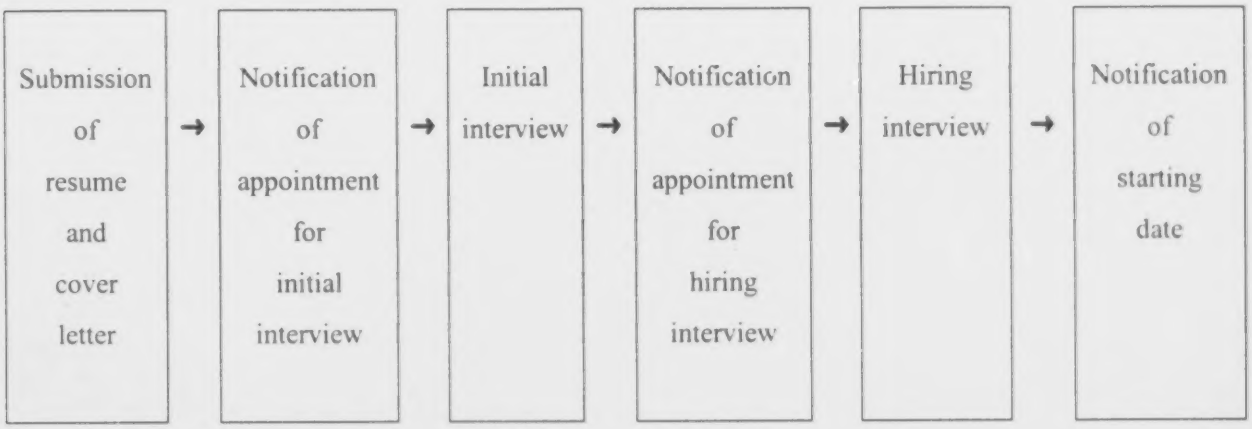
This manual is provided by the Office of Disability Services of Springfield Technical Community College to serve as a job-search guide only. It is not intended to entitle any person to employment by Springfield Technical Community College.

## Introduction

You may already be an experienced and successful job-seeker. However, you will find one or two pieces of information herein that will help you to expedite or facilitate your effort. If this proves you with even a marginal advantage in your pursuit of your dream job, this brief manual will be worth reading.

Now congratulate yourself. It hasn't been easy to get as far as you have. From the quantity and quality of work that you've done, you know that Springfield Technical Community College sends out knowledgeable competent graduates. The employers in this region know that, too. Through academic study, laboratory work, and field experience you have acquired a set of skills that will make you a valuable asset in your new workplace. That set of skills, however, is not enough to ***get*** you the job that you want. You also need a set of job-seeking skills that will help you to identify available openings, get you the interviews for those positions, and present yourself and your qualifications professionally and convincingly in those interviews. The purpose of this manual is to equip you with the skills that you need for that successful job search.

Your successful job search will consist of the following simplified sequence of activities:


Submission of resume and cover letter
Notification of appointment for initial interview
Initial interview
Notification of appointment for hiring interview
Hiring interview
Notification of starting date

## Equipment You Will Need

A minor investment in equipment (some of which you need for other practical purposes anyway) can facilitate your job search tremendously:

1. Highlighter (for circling ads in the Sunday paper)
2. Small stack of resumes (on bonded paper)
3. Stack of networking cards
4. List of professional references
5. List of personal references
6. Business grade correspondence paper for cover letters
7. Business envelopes
8. Access to a word processor with letter-quality printer
9. Access to a FAX transmitter
10. Postage stamps
11. Thank-you cards

**Highlighters** are extremely important when you begin the job search. They are helpful when looking through the classified advertisements in the newspaper because you can accent those jobs which are interesting to you. Also, highlighters will be helpful when reading through job descriptions. It is recommended that at least two different colored highlighters be used when reading through each job description in order to separate different sections of the ad. For example, one color may be used to accent the points of the job description which you would like to emphasize in your cover letter. The other color highlighter may be used to clarify the exact qualifications that the company is seeking in a candidate for the position. Regardless of how you chose to separate your job descriptions with the colored highlighters, be sure it is meaningful and helpful for you in the next steps of your job search.

Keeping a **small stack of resumes** (about 10 or 15) with you at all times is a very good idea. Not only so they are readily available when you see a job which you would like to apply for, but you also never know with whom you may be in a conversation regarding your career path. Anyone at any point could inquire about your job search and request to see your resume. If you are going to carry your resumes with you, be sure to keep them in a folder or some other protective holder that will keep them free from wrinkling and tearing. Remember: the presentation of your resume reflects on you as a potential job applicant.

Having a **list of professional references** is an essential part of the job search. Potential employers will often ask that you submit a typewritten copy of 3 to 5 professional references along with your resume at the time you apply for a job. A professional reference is someone with or for whom you have worked in the past and can speak highly of your attributes and character in a work setting. Your professors who taught courses in your academic major are usually good people to ask for references. It is important to remember that you "***always get permission ahead of time***" to use someone's name as a reference for a job.

Your **personal references** are a separate list much like that of your professional reference list. This list should be typewritten and include people who know you very well. However, unlike professional references, personal references usually are individuals who have never worked with you. The 3 to 5 people you chose to include on this list should be able to speak of your character in a highly positive way. This list, however, should not include family members. While family members know you well, employers usually assume that they are somewhat biased in their views.

Buy a box of inexpensive **thank-you cards** or note cards (with no greeting printed inside). Write and mail them to your interviewers so that they receive them within 48 hours of each interview.

**Networking cards** are not necessarily essential to your job search but certainly will be an asset. Networking cards are much like business cards but are designed for the beginning professional. These cards should be the same size as a business card and should contain the following information:

- your name,
- degree you have obtained,
- date of graduation,
- your phone number,
- street address, and/or e-mail address,
- a list of your top 4 attributes that make you a suitable candidate for the type of position you are seeking.

If you decide to design a networking card, make sure to carry several with you at all times. You can give them to anyone who may help you land a job in your field. Also, networking cards can take the place of carrying several copies of your resume.

**Jane Smith**

**AA, Human Services - May 1997**

**Springfield Technical Community College**

* Experienced at working with at-risk adolescents
* Excellent communication skills
* Trained at crisis intervention
* Various counseling techniques

1 Springfield Street (413)555-5555

Springfield, MA 01101 e-mail: jane@javanet.com

## When to Begin Your Search

Start circulating your resume and answering advertisements two months before you graduate. Employers seldom hire walk-ins on the spot to do the kind of work for which you have studied and trained. Since the application and interview process can be drawn out over weeks or months, you will need to begin your job search months in advance of your full-time availability. This will enable you to start working as soon as possible after graduation.

If an employer makes you an offer before graduation, ask if you can accept on a part-time basis while you finish your final semester. If an employer really wants to hire you, the employer will be flexible as long as you are, too. If the employer cannot be flexible, your best bet is to say thank you for the offer but that you need to finish your degree and would they please keep your resume on file if anything should come up in the future.

## Resume

Everybody needs help with resume preparation. College resource people who are available to you are:

Louisa M. Davis, Director
Pamela J. White, Assistant Director
Office of Cooperative Education Career Services and Transfer Affairs
Building 27, 2nd Floor
(413) 755-4464

and

Tom Kerner, Career Counselor
Office of Disability Services *
Building 27, 2nd Floor
(413) 755-4546

* In order to take advantage of the services offered by the Office of Disability Services, you must provide clinical documentation of your disability.

The College's Office of Disability Services has placed a set of resume preparation guides (software and conventional print) in the Adaptive Computer Lab for use by students and graduates with disabilities. They may be used in the Lab during regular business hours (Monday through Friday - 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM - year round).

Additionally, there are numerous publications and a great many software products available in bookstores and libraries that purport to help in resume preparation. As you review these products, keep in mind that, effective immediately, your resume is the most important document of your life because it is going to be a determining factor in how you pursue the rest of your working life. The time and care that you invest in your resume now will be more than justified by the number and variety of job interviews that they secure for you. You need to look for products that require you to do actual research into your past, digging out specific numbers and quantities (for examples: "recruited 36 new accounts" or "operated facility supplying fresh water to 115,500 households and 3,600 commercial/industrial users") and specific skills that you acquired and applied (for examples: "computed weights of steel I-beams up to 36.25 tons using trigonometry and solid geometry" or maintained skin integrity of 18 comatose patients.")

Any resume-preparation product that purports to generate your resume in a couple of hours probably is not eliciting nearly the amount of information that you need to place on it. There is no such thing as quick resume preparation. If you rush through it, you will leave out a lot of information that employers need to know. The compilation and editing of your marketable skills probably will require from ten to thirty hours.

Many large institutions use computerized resume scanners, which function best with resumes that are printed on plain white paper with no enhancements such as fancy type fonts or graphics. In the case of scanners, the person who reviews the scanned resumes will read them on a computer screen, never even having seen the hard copy. This is so much better for you because it means that you won't have to print on expensive paper. However, you should mail it in a 10-inch by 12-inch envelope because a scanner can misread a word that has a crease running through it.

Your resume may take months to prepare. It requires research, composition of a rough draft, and at least three sessions of editing. This means that you need to start it in your second-to-last semester. By word processing it and saving it on a disk, you will be able to make important additions to it based on your academic work in your final semester.

Take copies of your resume with you every place you go. Keep them in a sturdy pocket folder in your car or in your backpack. You never know whom you might encounter.

## Cover Letters

Cover letters will accompany all resumes that you sent out in reply to advertisements. Any of the standard business letter formats are acceptable. The easiest one is illustrated in Appendix 1. Be sure to begin with your return address and telephone number block. Follow with the mailing date. Next, put in the address block of the organization to which the letter is going. Direct it, if possible, to the attention of a particular individual.

The text of the cover letter contains three paragraphs, each with a special set of information:

1) the title of the job and where you found out about it;
2) your particular qualifications for meeting the needs that the employer expressed in the advertisement;
3) your request for an interview and information on how to contact you to arrange it at the *employer's convenience*.

Keep in mind that you can use this same system for every cover letter that you write. After you have done three or four, you will be able to compose them almost automatically. Sections 1) and 3) above don't require any elaboration. Section 2), however, requires some explanation: When employers write job descriptions of available positions, they are describing the ideal candidate. since this ideal candidate *does not exist*, the employer will hire the applicant who most nearly matches the list of qualifications. In order to compose Section 2) of your cover letter, simply read through the advertisement and address the employer's requirements item by item. Cross each item off in the advertisement as you write about it. If the employer has listed

any skills that you lack, don't mention them. However, you should finish this paragraph with an assurance to the employer that you enjoy learning new skills.

Be sure to keep a copy of every cover letter that you send out. When you are notified of an interview appointment, review the cover letter that you sent with your resume requesting that interview. Your interviewer(s) probably will ask you to elaborate on information in that letter. Rehearse some answers to yourself beforehand.

## Networking

Merriam-Webster's collegiate Dictionary (1996) defines "networking" as "the exchange of information...among individuals, groups, or institutions." Fortunatly, you don't have to construct your network. It is already in place. All you have to do is identify the elements of it and start working them.

***Everyone you know*** is a potential contact to a job referral. These people know other people. Tell all of them that you're looking for a job and what kind of job you want. Give each of them a copy of your resume or networking card.

Schedule time every Sunday or Monday to screen the "***Help-Wanted"*** ads in the Sunday paper, marking the interesting ones with your highlighter. Mail out your replies to the Sunday advertisements by Monday evening.

***One-stop career centers*** - Career Point in Holyoke (532-4900) and FutureWorks in Springfield (858-2800) are agencies that contract with the state to assist you in finding work. Their services, which are free of charge to you, include access to telephones, word processors, FAX units, and postings of job openings. Each center offers scheduled initial welcome sessions that introduce you to the services and facilities to which you will have access. Call ahead to find a time that is convenient for you. If you haven't registered at a one-stop career center, you should do so by the middle of your next-to-last semester.

***Professors*** are frequently approached by recruiters asking for recommendations of reliable hard-working students. Be sure to give copies of your resume to all of your professors in your academic major. This will facilitate their referring you to recruiters.

The College's ***Office of Cooperative Education, Career Placement and Transfer Affairs*** offers a job referral service to students who register. This requires five copies of your resume and filling in a brief registration form. Many employers contact the College directly seeking applicants for openings. This office notifies qualified registrants promptly by mail on receiving job postings. Additionally, students may come in personally to review the job postings in any degree category. They are arranged in binders by academic major, with the most recent postings placed on top. This office is located on the second floor of Building 27.

The ***Internet*** is a valuable source of up-to-the-minute information of numerous types. It is particularly useful for searching for jobs outside of your local area. You can use it to acquire information on employment opportunities regionally, nationally, and internationally. You also can use it for researching your prospective employers to find details of their product and service lines and their financial conditions. Your searches will be governed to an extent by the limitations of the mechanisms you use to get access to the Internet. One caution to observe is that some information sources tell you how regularly their information is up-dated while others do not. Sometimes you will not know if the information is current. The reference sections of the College library and your local public library have the facilities to get you started on your searches. Call ahead to see if you need to reserve keyboard time.

***Employment agencies*** - most agencies collect their fees only from the employers that hire the successful applicants. Other agencies, however, collect fees from the job applicants. If you decide to use an agency that requires you to pay, be sure to require a written guarantee of permanent employment before paying any money to that agency.

***Temporary employment ("temp") agencies*** are an excellent means of securing transitional employment in order to generate an income while you pursue your search for your full-time career position. There are other advantages as well, including the opportunities to avoid long-term commitment while you work for particular employers. By accepting a temporary position, you can get first-hand experience with an employer to find out if that employer has created the kind of work environment in which you can enjoy working.

## Disclosure of Disability and Accommodations Requirements

The general rule on disclosure of a disability is that it is personal information, and you need to reveal it only when it will have some impact on your interactions with the people with whom you are dealing. According to the Chairperson of the President's Committee on the Employment of people with disabilities, "The only reason to disclose a disability is if you require an accommodation for an interview or to perform the essential functions of a particular job." (Coelho - 1997) It is essential, however, that you deliver appropriate information well in advance of the time that it will be acted upon. Don't save it as a surprise. Nobody like surprises. If, for example, you communicate by TTY and Relay Operators, you need to put those telephone numbers on your resume and cover letters. The people who schedule your interviews will appreciate having this information in advance because it will enable and facilitate communication with you. If you need an accommodation (such as wheelchair access or a Sign Language interpreter) for your interview, you need to inform the person who schedules the appointment. Accommodations required for the interview are the ***only*** ones to disclose before the interview. You should clearly state your workplace accommodation needs in your hiring interview after you are offered the job. This will enable you to be productive the moment that you start working.

## Interviewing

If you are nervous about experiencing job interviews, you should contact the people named in the above **Resume** section of this guide. They will schedule appointments with you to perform realistic practice interviews in an office setting. This service is especially valuable to people who previously have never had to interview for jobs. College professional staff people will critique your interview performance with you, pointing out your strengths and making suggestions for improvements.

Every job has a dress code. Dress for your interviews as you have seen professionals dressed in their jobs. However, if your new career requires wearing a uniform, you should wear a dark conservatively-cut business suit to you interviews. Men and women interviewees should keep jewelry to a minimum because your interviewer needs to concentrate on you with no distractions. Be sure to polish your shoes. Don't apply perfume, after-shave lotion, or any other heavy fragrances before you interview. You never know if your interviewer is going to be allergic to them or might simply find them unpleasant. The only equipment you will need is a notebook, a pen, and a few extra copies of your resume in case they are needed. Your interviewers may expect you to jot down important numbers, words, and phrases.

The college's Office of Disability Services has CD's and videos on interviewing skills. They are available in the Adaptive Computing Lab on the same schedule as the resume resources on page 6 above. They will give you valuable details on how to present yourself as positively and professionally as possible.

College library and your local public library also have materials on the subject. As with most subjects, these sources will contradict each other on some details. However, they all agree on general principles and will be valuable in helping you to prepare for your interview.

There will be two distinct rounds of questioning in your interviews. Each of your interviewers will have a prepared set of questions for you. "Appendix 2" of this document contains a sample list of these questions. You should prepare a two- or three- sentence answer for each question. Limit your answers to ***30 seconds***. Confine your answers strictly to the questions that are asked. This will help you to keep your answers clear and concise, and your

interviewers will respect your courtesy. Be sure that you understand each question before answering. If you are unsure of your interviewer's meaning, ask for clarification.

The second round of questioning will be an invitation to you to ask some questions of your interviewers. "Appendix 3" of this manual offers some suggestions for you to rephrase in your own words. Your interviewers will expect you to express your concerns, but limit yourself to ***three or four questions***. Remember once again that your interviewers have to budget their time, and they will appreciate your understanding.

Regardless of how much you practice, you still will be nervous in your interviews because a lot of your life depends on how well you present yourself in a short period of time to complete strangers who are scrutinizing you very carefully. If you feel uncomfortable in the interview, and the quality of your presentation suffers because of your discomfort, be sure to tell your interviewer that you are very motivated and highly qualified in your field but that you have very little experience at interviewing and just don't do well in interviews. Your interviewer will take this into account when evaluating your performance.

At the close of each interview ask for the interviewer's business card. This will facilitate your sending your interviewer a personal thank-you card or note.

## Interim/Temporary Employment

Most graduates accept interim employment in order to pay their bills while continuing their searches for their dream jobs. There is nothing wrong with this. In fact, the employer who finally hires you in your career field will look positively on your work ethic if you are willing to work outside of your field on an interim basis. It shows that you enjoy working and are flexible. Temporary employment can also be an opportunity to get on-the-job training and experience.

Temporary staffing agencies can be helpful to you in finding these interim placements, both inside and outside of your career field. Moreover, placement by a temp agency can lead to an offer of full-time permanent employment. Temporary placements can also give you an inside look at an organization to help you decide if you want to start a career there.

If you have a choice of interim jobs, accept one that is related to your chosen field. If necessary, accept a series of jobs that approximate your career choice more and more closely until you interview successfully for the one that you truly want.

On the same theme, be prepared to accept part-time work in your field while you continue your search for full-time career-track employment. Your interviewers and supervisors probably had the same experience. They will look positively on your experience and on your willingness to work.

## Accepting Rejections

Keep a file of your rejection letters. Like everyone else, you will get a lot of them. You will feel tremendously frustrated at times, remember there are College staff people who are here to assist you in your job search. If you feel that you are not getting anywhere with it, make an appointment to come in and review the strategies that you are applying. You might have left out an important element of your search, or the job market in your field might be particularly difficult at the time of your search. Either way, your College placement staff people can help you with advice, counseling, and referrals. When you finally accept the offer of your dream job with your dream employer, you will be glad that you sought help and persevered. .

## Rejecting Acceptances

If you are apprehensive about accepting a job offer (or staying in a job where you do not feel successful), your College placement staff people, once again, are here to help you with your decision-making. Reluctance or unhappiness are indicators that your intuition is telling you something about workplace issues - not necessarily career choice matters. Listen to your intuition. Discuss the issues in specific terms with the College's career staff before you make a decision. Remember that your work environment is just as important as the work itself. If you cannot quit a stressful and aggravating job due to financial reasons, make an appointment with your College career staff to design a job search plan around your work schedule. You are qualified for an interesting and rewarding job in a workplace that you will enjoy going into every day. You have worked hard for that privilege, and you deserve it. Now go for it.

**Appendix 1**

1501 Main St. - Apt. 4C
Ludlow, Ma 01102
(413) 788-2304

October 17, 1997

UltraTech Coatings Corporation
Attn: Human Resources
788 Springfield Street
Chicopee, Ma 01013

To Whom It May Concern:

Enclosed please find my resume in response to your advertisement for an Administrative Assistant in the Sunday Republican of October 16.

My extensive successful experience in customer service and complaint resolution could be very useful to your company. I can manage various multi-line telephone systems. My office skills include Microsoft Access, Microsoft Word, and WordPerfect. I also have experience with numerous filing systems. Enjoyment of working a variety of tasks and effective prioritization are among my strengths. I work well independently and also enjoy cooperating on teams.

I feel that I am well qualified for this position. Please contact me at the above return address or telephone number to arrange an interview at your convenience.

Yours,

Gregory Leese

## Appendix 2

### Questions Frequently Asked by Recruiters

1. Tell me something about yourself.
2. What do you see yourself doing as a career in five years?
3. Do you work well under pressure?
4. How do you feel about working as a team member?
5. How do you feel about working independently?
6. What particular strengths will you bring to this position?
7. What are some areas that you feel you need to work on?
8. Think about the best supervisor you ever had, and tell me what made that person a good supervisor.
9. Without mentioning any names, please describe a serious problem you have had in your workplace, and tell how you handled it.
10. What types of people present the greatest challenges to you?
11. What types of people do you get along with least?
12. Why did you leave your last employer?
13. Why have you changed careers?
14. What things do you do to handle job stress?
15. If you could tell me one thing right now that would make me hire you on the spot, what would that be?
16. Why have you chosen to pursue a career in this field?
17. How are you at managing time?
18. Can you prioritize your work?
19. Why do you think you would like to work for this company?
20. Tell me about your experience and how it relates to this position.
21. Can you make occasional 2-day and 3-day trips?
22. How do you evaluate your own success or failure?
23. Please describe the work environment in which you are most comfortable.

## Appendix 3

### Questions You Can Ask a Recruiter

1. Why do you enjoy working for this organization?
2. What are the opportunities for advancement here?
3. Do you anticipate employment stability or expansion?
4. What were the biggest challenges that my predecessor faced?
5. Does the company promote from within or recruit from the outside?
6. How does the company encourage continued education?
7. How long do people typically work in this position?
8. How will my performance be evaluated?
9. What industry or economic trends could influence the company's staffing?
10. What management style is encouraged by the company's leadership?
11. Do you offer any in-house training programs?
12. What are the promotion possibilities from this job?
13. What are this company's greatest strengths?
14. Please describe the work environment.

# References

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